

Message Text

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12

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00

NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 IO-14 DPW-01

ACDA-19 DRC-01 /147 W

----- 012208

O R 151143Z DEC 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0003

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST

USDEL JEC PARIS

CUSSAG NKP

CINCPAC

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: MARR, VS

SUBJ: COMMUNIST ATTACK ON FOUR PARTY JOINT MILITARY TEAM HELICOPTERS

REF: SAIGON 20983

1. FOLLOWING IS AN EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT OF COMMUNIST ATTACK ON THREE FPJMT HELICOPTERS ON A JCRC MISSION TO INVESTIGATE AN AIR-CRAFT CRASH SITE IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 8B OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT. INCIDENT TOOK PLACE IN WESTERN GIA DINH PROVINCE NOT FAR FROM SAIGON. IT RESULTED IN TWO DEAD (ONE AMERICAN AND ONE VIETNAMESE) AND SEVEN WOUNDED (FOUR AMERICANS AND THREE VIETNAMESE).

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2. THE RANKING US OFFICER IN THE LEAD COMMAND HELICOPTER

CONDUCTING A JCRC CRASH SITE INVESTIGATION IN GIA DINH PROVINCE SOUTHWEST OF SAIGON, MAJOR RICHARD LARITZ, APPEARED AT TODAY'S (DEC 15) GVN AFTERNOON PRESS BRIEFING TO GIVE A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF THE COMMUNIST AMBUSH. HE TOLD ABOUT FIFTY CORRESPONDENTS, REPRESENTING VIRTUALLY ALL LEADING US AND VIETNAMESE MEDIA, THAT HE WITNESSED ONE OF HIS UNARMED OFFICERS SHOT AND KILLED AS HE STOOD BESIDE HIS HELICOPTER WITH HIS HANDS IN THE AIR. MAJOR LARITZ, WHO HAS BEEN IN THE KOREAN WAR AND SERVED SEVERAL TOURS IN VIETNAM, SAID: "MY OFFICER WAS GUNNED DOWN. HE WAS MURDERED IN COLD BLOOD. IT WAS AS SIMPLE AS THAT."

3. MAJOR LARITZ SAID THE THREE VNAF CHOPPERS ASSIGNED TO THE JCRC OPERATION WERE UNARMED AND CLEARLY BORE THE INTERNATIONAL ORANGE MARKINGS OF AIRCRAFT FLYING IN VIETNAM FOR THE TPJMC AND THE FPJMT.

4. THE AMBUSH TOOK PLACE AT ABOUT 8:40AM DEC 15, MAJOR LARITZ SAID, AS THE THREE HELICOPTERS HAD JUST LANDED TO START THE THIRD DAY OF AN INVESTIGATION OF A US PLANE CRASH DATING FROM JULY 1966. HE ESTIMATED THAT THE AMBUSH, IN WHICH ONE CHOPPER WAS DESTROYED BY A B-40 ROCKET, LASTED ABOUT THREE MINUTES BEFORE THE OTHER TWO AIRCRAFT WERE ABLE TO TAKE OFF AND CIRCLE THE AREA. HE SAID HE PERSONALLY SAW TWO MACHINE GUNS FIRING NEAR THE LANDING AREA AND WITNESSED AT LEAST TWO B-40 ROCKET EXPLOSIONS. IN ADDITION, HE SAW SEVERAL PEOPLE DRESSED IN GRAY UNIFORMS WITH "FLOPPY" HATS STANDING ON THE GROUND FIRING SMALL ARMS.

5. MAJOR LARITZ EXPLAINED THAT THE THREE HELICOPTERS PUT DOWN ON A LANDING ZONE PREPARED BY THE JCRC TEAM THE PREVIOUS DAY, IN ORDER TO GIVE ORDINANCE PERSONNEL TIME TO SWEEP THE PAD BEFORE USING IT AGAIN DURING THE SCHEDULED OPERATION. WHEN ALMOST ALL THIRTEEN JCRC PERSONNEL HAD DISEMBARKED FROM THE CHOPPERS, THE AMBUSH STARTED. ONE CHOPPER, ABOUT 30 METERS FROM THE ENEMY FORCE, RECEIVED A DIRECT HIT AND EXPLODED, HURLING ITS VIETNAMESE CREW ONTO THE GROUND. THE JCRC TEAM MEMBERS IMMEDIATELY TOOK PROTECTIVE ACTION, MAJOR LARITZ SAID, THROWING THEMSELVES ON THE GROUND. THE AMERICAN OFFICER WHO WAS KILLED HAD FOLLOWED STANDARD JCRC INSTRUCTIONS TO ASSUME AN ATTITUDE OF SURRENDER TO SHOW ATTACKERS HE WAS UNARMED AND WORE ORANGE FPJMT MARKING ON HIS FATIGUE, HE ADDED.

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6. MAJOR LARITZ SAID THE REMAINING CHOPPERS WERE ABLE TO SWOOP IN AT ONCE AND PICK UP SOME OF THE WOUNDED ON THE GROUND BEFORE ENEMY FIRE FORCED THEM TO TAKE OFF AGAIN. HE SAID THAT ABOUT 15 MINUTES AFTER THE AMBUSH, VIETNAMESE GUNSHIPS ARMED WITH ROCKETS AND AUTOMATIC WEAPONS, ATTACKED THE COMMUNISTS KILLING PERHAPS FIVE OF THE ENEMY.

7. LATER, REMAINING WOUNDED WERE RESCUED BY VNAF HELICOPTERS AND FLOWN TO TAN SON NHUT AIRFIELD FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT, LARITZ SAID. HE EXPRESSED HIGH PRAISE FOR THE VNAF PILOTS WHO FLEW THE MISSION AND SAID HE RECOMMENDED THEM FOR HIGHEST MILITARY HONORS.

8. COLONEL NGHIA, CHIEF GVN DEL TO THE FPJMT, EXPLAINED TO NEWSMEN THAT BOTH THE PRG AND DRV DELS WERE INFORMED OFFICIALLY ON DEC 6 WHERE AND WHEN THE JCRC CRASH SITE INVESTIGATION WAS SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE. COLONEL NGHIA DISPLAYED A DOCUMENT VERIFYING THIS, PLUS RECEIPTS FOR THE DOCUMENT GIVEN BY THE PRG DEL. HE SAID THE PRG WAS INVITED TO ACCOMPANY THE CRASH SITE OPERATION, BUT DID NOT REPLY.

9. COMMENT: WE ASSUME DEPT SPOKESMAN WILL TAKE EARLY OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE GOOD USE OF FOREGOING ACCOUNT. FYI WE ARE FILING PROTEST WITH ICCS AND WILL TRANSMIT TEXT SEPTTEL WHEN DELIVERY MADE. END FYI.
MARTIN

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